

New Deputy Refuge Manager enjoying the Kenai after five years in Bethel

by Doug Staller

In early June of this year, I moved to the Kenai Refuge as the new deputy manager, coming from Bethel and the 19 million-acre Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge.

I knew that life in Bethel was going to be different from the very first night when we stepped off the plane after the very long flight from Fargo, North Dakota; all the signs were bilingual, but I couldn't recognize Yup'ik.

Life in Bethel revolved around three schedules: Alaska Airlines, salmon runs, and the first and last barges of the year. I must say that I won't miss the flights from Anchorage to Bethel and cramming every nook and cranny of luggage with things that were much cheaper "in town." Every now and then I still pinch myself to make sure I'm not dreaming as I look at the mountain and ocean views that are so striking on the Kenai.

Before Alaska, I served as refuge manager at Tewaukon Refuge Complex in North Dakota—I like to tell folks I moved to Bethel because the weather was better. Prior to that assignment, I worked in the Refuge System headquarters office as Division chief of Visitor Services and Communications.

Fire assignments took me across the prairies of the Midwest, to deserts in New Mexico and the outskirts of Yellowstone Park. Burns, Oregon, Bismarck, North Dakota, and Pickensville, Alabama were other stops along my career path that my very patient wife Marge has enjoyed or in some cases, endured, to be more precise. Marge and our nine-year-old son Dalton are especially excited about the Kenai move, I'm glad to report. Our black lab and cockatiel, I'm not too sure about.

In April of this year, I was honored to be part of a team that received a cooperative conservation award from the Secretary of Interior for our work with Sea Lion Native Corporation and the village of Hooper Bay

on reducing the impacts of all-terrain vehicles on migratory birds. The team was one of two from Alaska and twenty nationwide recognized on Earth Day at a ceremony in Washington D.C.

My move from the Yukon Delta to Kenai exemplifies the wide diversity of the Refuge System here in Alaska. Most of Yukon Delta Refuge is a vast complex of wetlands that are one of the world's most important nesting areas for migratory birds. The Kenai Refuge on the other hand with its mountains, glaciers, lakes and rivers is a composite of all the ecosystems found in our state. Because Yukon Delta is roadless, we were totally dependent on aircraft and boats to accomplish our work. At least a portion of the Kenai is accessible by vehicles. The Kenai Refuge is a destination for visitors from across the state and country. Due to its remote location and the difficult access, Yukon Delta doesn't receive many visitors, but there are 43 villages within the exterior boundaries of the refuge that depend on the natural resources to support their subsistence way of life.

Alaska boasts sixteen National Wildlife Refuges. Each is unique in its own way. These refuges range from the many islands of Alaska Maritime Refuge to the vast coastal plain of Arctic Refuge. Only two of the Refuges are on the road system (Kenai and Tetlin). Along with more than 500 refuges in other parts of the country, they all have an important role to play in conserving the wildlife heritage of our country and helping.

The Kenai Refuge has a long history of conservation achievements in Alaska, and I am honored to have the opportunity to add to this legacy.

Doug Staller is the new deputy refuge manager at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Previous Refuge Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.